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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 HARARE 001493

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SUBJECT: CONFERENCE PAVES WAY FOR EXTENDING MUGABE'S TERM,
CONTINUED SUCCESSION BATTLES

REF: A. REF A: HARARE 1482

[1](#)B. REF B: HARARE 1465

Classified By: Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, a.i., Eric T. Schultz
under Section 1.5 b/d

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) In a well-scripted development, the December 14-17 ZANU-PF conference adopted a resolution recommending that the ruling party unify the presidential and parliamentary elections in 2010. The recommendation, which will require amending the constitution in Parliament, must first be approved by ZANU-PF's Central Committee and Politburo. Political insiders with whom we talked told us the recommendation met significant resistance from ZANU-PF members, especially those backing Vice President Joyce Mujuru. The Mujurus are expected by our interlocutors to mount a battle in the Politburo over the amendment with an eye toward convincing Mugabe to step down well before 2010 elections in favor of Joyce Mujuru. They are, however, unlikely to oppose in Parliament or publicly whatever amendment ultimately emerges from the Politburo. In our view, they will have a difficult time overcoming Mugabe's concerns for his personal safety and the corrupt interests of his wife and inner circle in prolonging Mugabe's hold on power. The amendment should emerge from the Politburo in late spring, and its wording, especially with respect to succession, will give the clearest indication of the Mujurus' success. End Summary.

Conference Passes Pre-Cooked Resolution

¶2. (C) As expected (ref B), the 4,000 delegates at the ZANU-PF conference adopted without open debate a resolution recommending that the elections be unified in 2010. According to ruling party Central Committee member Morton Malianga, the campaigning had been conducted before hand and the adoption was a "done deal" before the conference even kicked off.

¶3. (C) Malianga, Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA) analyst Sidney Masamvu, and ZANU-PF insiders Leo Mugabe and Eddie Zvobgo Jr all separately told the Charge and poloffs that the Conference resolution was the first step in a process to postpone elections until 2010. The resolution now goes to the party's Central Committee, which is likely to rubber stamp the idea, and then on to the Politburo in February or March for recommendations as to the constitutional modalities for extension of the term. Finally, a constitutional amendment is expected to be introduced into Parliament by the middle of 2007.

A Rocky Road Ahead

¶4. (C) According to all of our interlocutors, passage of the conference resolution was deeply unpopular with parts of ZANU-PF. Many ZANU-PF members are fed up with the economic collapse and want reengagement with the international community. While respecting Mugabe's past contributions they believe he must go for things to improve. Nevertheless, Mugabe orchestrated the conference to, at least for now,

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sideline those who opposed his remaining in office.

¶5. (C) Masamvu noted that Solomon Mujuru, in particular, was on a "war path" against Mugabe remaining in office, and that the conference had appointed several of Mujuru's underlings to the Central Committee and to the Politburo. While the Central Committee was likely to rubber stamp a presidential term extension, Masamvu believed the battle would be joined in the politburo.

¶6. (C) Zvobgo said that the "intelligent" option for ZANU-PF would be for Mugabe step back sometime in 2008 and allow a successor to govern for two years before facing the voters in 2010 as the incumbent. He confirmed that a struggle was likely between Mugabe and those opposed to his remaining in office indefinitely, principally the Mujurus, in the weeks and months leading up to the Politburo meeting and in the Politburo itself.

¶7. (C) Zvobgo said, and we would agree, that the Mujurus would not take the struggle as far as the Parliament and would not openly oppose Mugabe. He noted that the wording of the constitutional amendment when it emerged from the Politburo would provide important clues to the outcome of power struggle going on behind the scenes. Elimination of the constitution's succession clause that requires an election within 45 days after the president resigns or dies would indicate, according to Zvobgo, that Mugabe was potentially willing to appoint a successor and stand down before 2010. Leaving the constitution in tact, however, would suggest that Mugabe intended to soldier on and remain in office, perhaps even beyond 2010.

Mugabe Trying To Hold On) To Bitter End

¶8. (C) Despite pressure on him to leave in 2008, our contacts uniformly reported that Mugabe) and perhaps equally importantly, those around him) desperately wanted to hold on to power. Lending support to this view, Mugabe

told journalists after the conference, "Who needs forever? God is there; I can't live forever." Many observers took these comments to mean that Mugabe, who turns 83 in February, intends to die in office.

¶9. (C) University of Zimbabwe political science professor John Makumbe told polchief on December 19 that Mugabe's concerns for his personal security were paramount in the leader's decision-making process. While Makumbe did not rule out the possibility that Mujuru could force Mugabe to make a deal involving his stepping down, he said these concerns made it highly unlikely. A successor would likely have to consolidate power at Mugabe's expense, a fact that Mugabe surely knows.

¶10. (C) Adding to these comments, Masamvu said that a third faction of ZANU-PF, including First Lady Grace Mugabe, ZANU-PF Information Secretary Nathan Shamuyarira, National Security Minister Didymus Mutasa, Reserve Bank Governor Gideon Gono, and many of the so-called securecrats in the Central Intelligence Organization, had concluded their own interest would best be served if Mugabe continued in office. As the IMF recently observed (ref A), many insiders continued to belly up to state coffers for personal enrichment and any change to the status quos would jeopardize their pocket books.

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Comment

¶11. (C) Mugabe appears to have won this battle; the conference endorsed a 2010 consolidated presidential-parliamentary election, leaving the path open for Mugabe to remain in office at least until 2010. However, he has yet to cement his prize and Mujuru still has several cards to play, especially in the Politburo, which will be the key battle ground of the next six months. There are several possible succession scenarios that could emerge in that time frame and no shortage of potential successors, which we will explore in depth via septel. However, this lack of clarity plays into Mugabe's hands if he is intent on maintaining power as it will allow him to continue to set party factions against one another in order to protect his hold on power. That said, even if Mugabe dismisses the "intelligent option" and attempts to press on beyond 2008 and 2010, he will still have to deal with a collapsing economy and, as a result, his increasing unpopularity both within ZANU-PF and in the country as a whole.
SCHULTZ